

An Interview with
Elmer “Elmo” L. Donze

at his home in
Ste. Genevieve, Missouri

06 December 1996

interviewed by Ray Brassieur
transcript edited by N. Renae Farris



Oral History Program
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[Tape Counter 000; Begin Tape 1, Side 1. Begin Interview.]

RB: This is Ray Brassieur speaking with Elmer L. Donze at his home in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, on Monday December 9th, 1996.

ED: ... County Sun. But before the Perry County Sun, it was this paper here. And I purchased... That was all handset type.

RB: This was called the Perryville...?

ED: The Perryville Weekly Union. And they changed the name to the Perry County Sun, and I purchased the Perry County Sun and I changed the name to The Monitor, which still remains.

RB: But then is that the same one that your son took over?

?: Yeah, uh-huh.

ED: Well, no, no.

?: No?

ED: He didn't take over The Monitor, he bought a different, another newspaper in Perryville. Let's see... I sold The Monitor to Paul Pautler. He's a graduate of Missouri University, Paul Pautler. I sold the...

You know, in those days there was no offset. (laughter) And I had a building, and I had a letterpress in the basement, hand-fed letterpress. And we had the composing equipment, linotypes, and "klugies" [?spelling?], you know, and all that stuff -- and that on the first floor. The second floor, I had a studio for my radio. So I called the newspaper The Monitor, sort of tie it in, see? And we had a theme song called "The

Monitor," and we used that on the radio. And we had a good thing going for quite a while, but I got so busy doing other things that I thought, "I'll just sell the newspaper." Sold the whole thing for \$25,000.

RB: Let's see, let's go back a little bit. How did you first get started in the newspaper business?

ED: Well, I was in the radio business.

RB: First?

ED: Yeah. And I saw this Perry County Sun was going down and down and down. Perryville's always been a Republican county. And so I was a Democrat, and not on the radio, but -- you know, I voted for the best man -- but I was originally a Democrat. So I knew the Zoellner brothers -- and they were getting up in age, very old -- and I met them, made a proposition to them. And I would continue it as a Democrat paper.

RB: And that's who owned it? Who owned it then at that time?

ED: Zoellners.

RB: They were Republican?

ED: No, they were Democrats! The other paper was called The Republican. It was owned by the Guths, and the Guths sold to the syndicate. And then Pautler sold the paper he bought from me, The Monitor, to the same syndicate, and they presently own the two papers in Perryville. And my son, he bought another paper from... It was a farm paper, originally, and he made it into a -- it's a bi-county paper now -- Ste. Gen [Genevieve] and Perryville,

two counties. He figured with two counties he could make it pay. Hasn't been too profitable for him, but he's got a quality newspaper.

RB: Right, I enjoy it when I come by here.

ED: Am I getting ahead too fast?

RB: Well, we'll slow up a little bit as we talk about...

ED: She [his wife] does all the billing for the newspaper -- the old-fashioned way, she has no computer. She does it all by hand.

RB: Your wife, Betty?

ED: In the office, yeah.

RB: So she's working for your son now?

ED: Yeah.

RB: And that's for the Sun-Times.

ED: We're *both* working for him! (laughs) I'm the janitor. (laughs)

RB: You're the janitor?! (laughter) Well, let's go back, Mr. Donze. Now you were in the radio business, you say, and this...?

ED: Yeah, I started the radio business in 1947. Actually, a brother and I, we started the business. It was *my* idea. See, I was in the service, in the Air Force. And when I was in the Air Force I was a musician, you know. And I met a lot of these musicians. And they all hung around the... Every base had a local radio station, a ?carrier? _____ affair, you know. I used to go over and pull records for the guys -- you know, disc jockeys -- and I got acquainted with a lot of radio people. That's when I got interested in radio. So I

thought, "When I come home, I'm going to build a radio station." And I did. Of course, my brother was partners with me at that time.

RB: What's your brother's name?

ED: Norbert. He passed away about five years ago. He was next to me in age. I'm the eldest of nine children in the family. And I was the last one to get married.

RB: So you were born in 1916?

ED: '16, yeah. October.

RB: What day in October?

ED: 28th.

RB: October 28th? I'm on the 24th!

ED: Is that right?

RB: Yes, sir.

ED: You're a scorpion too.

RB: Yes sir, uh-huh. (Chuckles) Right. And then you got married, you were the last one to get married.

ED: Yeah, I was thirty-three.

RB: When did you get married? So that was in...?

ED: June. I figured our good Lord was crucified when he was thirty-three, I figured I might as well! (laughter)

RB: So you get him up and... (Laughter) Did you meet Mrs. Donze here in town, was she from here?

ED: Yeah, she's a local girl. She worked for a photographer, Mr. Dunker, who was well known throughout the industry. He built a lot of cameras for the government during the war. He had a number of people working for him, and he always maintained a studio. And my wife came out of high school and she was a schoolteacher for a while, and then she went to work for Mr. Dunker, worked for him for nine years. And then when we became acquainted, she was right across the street from... I lost my office force -- my program director, really -- and I asked her if she would consider going to work for me. And she did, and that's how we became acquainted. And we left... (chuckles) We decided one day to get married, and we knew a priest that was here, Father Leo P. Kampman, and he made arrangements for us to get married in Japan, Missouri.

RB: Japan, Missouri! (Laughs)

ED: Was a former priest who used to be here, and he was a good friend of both families. And Father [Henry] Ahrens, he called this priest and told him we wanted to get married, and he said, "Send 'em up!"

RB: What's her maiden name?

ED: What's that?

RB: Family name?

ED: Schwent. A good German name. You have a French name, don't you?

RB: Yes, sir.

ED: So we eloped. We took off and went over there and got married and had a quiet wedding. We got over there and we went to the rectory and he was waiting for us. Then we went

over to the church and we thought he'd have a couple of altar boys there, you know, someone to help with the mass. And no one was there. We looked around, and Father said, "Do you still remember your...? You were altar boys." See, I took... My sister and her husband went along with us -- as a matter of fact, they came over, we met them over there -- for best man, you know. And Father looked at us and said, "You remember your mass prayers?" We said, "Yeah!" He said, "Well, you're going to have to serve mass." So we knelt down and we answered the mass prayers. And then when it was over, my wife had a camera along, and the priest took our pictures at the altar. (laughter)

RB: That's what you call an intimate wedding!

ED: That's about as cheap a wedding as there ever was, I believe! (laughs) We tell people we were married in Japan. (laughter) A big joke, you know.

RB: But you were already in the radio business by that time.

ED: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was 1950. We were married in 1950. June 1950.

RB: How about your folks? Was your dad still around at that time?

ED: My dad -- when we got married -- wasn't around. Yeah, my mother lived to be ninety-eight, and she had her garden the last year she lived, and I hope I have some of her genes! (laughs)

RB: Right. What was her name, your mom's name?

ED: Elizabeth Mary.

RB: And her maiden name?

ED: Her maiden name [was Huck.] Well, my mother was married twice. Her first husband was [Fred] Rottler, and he was a brewer at the brewery they had here. They lived right across the street. He passed away. And then my father came along. He was a traveling salesman. And he was a local boy.

RB: What was his name?

ED: Lawrence W. [William] Donze. He passed away when he was seventy-seven. So they married and...

RB: Now, you say you were already a musician before you went into the service. Did you get that influence from him, or from family or...?

ED: No, my sister... My older sister [Cornelia Rottler Edwards], who's [from my mother's] first marriage, step-sister, was quite a musician. She played piano and played violin. And when we kids came along, she saw that we all got music lessons. And I was the oldest, of course -- I was the first one -- and I started on drums. And then I went to piano. Thank goodness I went to a piano because I learned both clefs, you know, and everything, and I learned the rudiments. Thank goodness for later years I went to arranging, and when I came home after the war, I had my own band here, and I wrote all the arrangements for my band. I've got stacks of arrangements up in the attic. That was a sideline.

RB: Is that what you'd call a big band in those days, Big Band Era?

ED: Yeah, I had a nine-piece band. And I was on the road in the late '30s, you know. I left college and joined a band. My first job was the St. Louis Casa Loma Ballroom. Well, I

played... When I went to college, my dad didn't have any money to send all of us kids to school, you know, so I graduated in '34, in '35 I went to college, and I worked in a music store for "Peg" Meyer. St. Louis Band Instrument Company. And then from there...

RB: Which college were you going to?

ED: Southeast Missouri State College, it's at Cape Girardeau. I got a job with the hotel, played at the supper club. I played there in the evenings, and I played in the band and orchestra at the college, paid for my tuition, and I worked at the music store. So everything on my own, you know.

RB: Were you studying music in school?

ED: Yeah, I took a college... I started on a career with music. And so I took that and learned all the instruments. You know, basically you didn't learn to get real efficient at them, but you had to learn every instrument. And so this man by the name of Jack Stalcup [had] a band for the Southland. They were playing a date in Cape Girardeau, and he happened to come in this supper club in the early evening and he heard me play. And he asked me if I would be interested in joining his orchestra. I was thrilled to death! "Well, not right off," he said. "I like your tone and I like your style," he said. "Would you want to come over and sit in at intermission with our...? During [your] intermission, come over and sit in with my band?" And I was thrilled to death! So I went over and it was just down the block where they were playing, in a hall in Cape Girardeau. So I went down there and I sat in for a few sets and they handed me the first trumpet parts... *[With emotion]* I get so emotional when I talk about this! (laughs) I'm *still* thrilled, you know. So I came off the

stand after a couple, three sets we played. And I thought, "I've got to get back to the hotel." And he said, "You know, if you want a job, I've got a job waiting for you. We're playing at the Casa Loma Ballroom in St. Louis. I'll get you a union card. All you need to do is get a tux. I'll hold the job for you. So as soon as you can get away, why, come on up, a job's waiting for you."

RB: What year was that then?

ED: Hmm, 1936, I guess. So I caught a bus and came home, and my mother said, "What are you doing home?!" I said, "Well, I'm going to quit school." She said, "Oh, no, don't do that!" I told her, well, I had this big offer and I just couldn't turn it down. She said, "Well, we hate to see you quit school, the way you've got things going for you down there. But if you want to do that, it's okay with us." So the next day I caught a bus to St. Louis and I bought me a tux. And I looked the band up, they were living at the Idan-Ha Hotel.

RB: Which hotel was that?

ED: The Idan-Ha. No, wait a minute, I get these names mixed up. The Idan-Ha Hotel is where I was playing in Cape Girardeau. This was the Plaza Hotel in St. Louis. It's located [in the vicinity of] Olive, Lindell, [and] Locust. It's on four streets. It's right on them. So I met the band and went out to it that afternoon for rehearsal with them, and that night I was on the bandstand at the Tune Town. It was originally Arcadia Ballroom, and they changed the name in later years to Tune Town. No, that's the wrong -- Casa Loma Ballroom. We played at Tune Town, also, but Casa Loma Ballroom is where I

joined the band, the Casa Loma Ballroom. That's on Cherokee and Iowa in St. Louis -- still there. It burned down, they built it back the same way. And they're still having bands there, you know, when they can get them, but there're not many bands on the road anymore. So forgive me for getting these names confused. My memory's gone. I have to think back, you know. (chuckles)

RB: That's way back, anyway. That's a long time ago. It's been some years.

ED: Yeah, a long time ago. So I played with Jack Stalcup for about four years and then I went to Europe with an orchestra. It was a college band. I spoke German fluently.

RB: You spoke German?

ED: Oh yeah, at home, we always spoke German. When the younger kids came up, you know, we older people, we spoke German until we... They didn't know what we were talking about, you know.

RB: That's what I wondered about *your* name, Mr. Donze, if that was...?

ED: I'll get around to it, I'll tell you about that. So at one time I spoke three languages. We moved to Texas for a couple years. My dad bought a citrus grove down there, so we went down to Texas and went to school with all these Mexican kids. So you *had* to speak Spanish or you couldn't get along. So I learned Spanish -- you know, the clichés and things that you learn at first, you know. And I got pretty good, speaking Spanish. And I'm still learning how to speak English! (laughs)

RB: How about French, though?

ED: No, I spoke no French. No, never learned any French. When I went to Europe was an amazing thing. I told the fellows, "Now, when we get to Germany, don't worry about it, I can handle it." You know, proud of my expertise in German. Man, they spoke so fast, there were so many different dialects, I had a hard time. We got by, but boy, that was... I got kidded from then on about that. (laughter)

RB: It didn't fall on your ear the same way.

ED: Oh, no! No, it's these different dialects. Even over there they have different dialects, you know. At one time, I thought I could speak three languages pretty good (chuckles), but the Spanish has gotten away from me now.

RB: Because your parents spoke German?

ED: Yeah, everybody around here spoke German, fluently.

RB: How long did they continue to speak German here in Ste. Genevieve?

ED: Well, it's dying out now. There's still a few who speak [it]. Yeah, the older people. Yeah, they speak German. When they're around some people that [they] don't want to know what they're talking about, they speak German.

RB: But it was very common when you were young, though.

ED: Oh, very common, very common, yeah. Very common.

RB: How about when you went to school, like when you went to grade school?

ED: When I first started to school, I couldn't speak English. That's what they *told* me -- I had to learn how to speak from my brother!

RB: You were speaking German?

ED: *German.*

RB: Do you recall in grade school: Were you allowed to speak German or could you continue...?

ED: No, the teachers were all English-speaking people. But, oh, they all used a little German, you know, to get the younger ones that come in school and spoke German only, to learn how to get along.

RB: Some of your schoolteachers may have been German, too.

ED: Oh yeah, I'm sure they were, yeah. Had to get along, yeah -- had to speak German to get along, yeah.

RB: That's interesting.

ED: So many tangents I get on here -- I'm off the track, you know. So where were we?

(chuckles)

RB: Well, we were playing music and traveling to Germany.

ED: Okay.

RB: This was right before the war, I guess, in the late '30s?

ED: Yeah. I enlisted. I took a cadet examination. I passed it and I enlisted in the Air Force, and I was to be a pilot. I went through training and never got out of the United States. Never, never got out of the United States. While I was in the service, we were sitting around waiting for graduation and an order came through, "Wash the older [men]." I was about to be twenty-seven, and if you didn't graduate before you were twenty-seven, you got automatically washed. And I was about to be twenty-seven, so we pilots who knew

how to [fly], was washed out. I was always ahead of my class. I had my private pilot's license before I went into service! When I enlisted in the Air Force, I took the examination at the air base in Sikeston, and then they sent me to college, back to Cape [to] take meteorology and things. So I got my private pilot license in Cape Girardeau -- "Civil Pilots Training Association" or something -- and I had my private pilot's license before I into service. So then when I got in service, my instructor asked us who had any previous flying experience. Well, I went and raised my hand, you know. "You get over here, or you get over here, or get over here." So it helped me in my private training. Then when I got washed out, I had to go down and take all the exams, you know, again. You know where I ended up? In G2.

RB: What is that?

ED: Intelligence. (laughs) And I was sure they made a mistake! (laughter) So I went back and checked, and no, they said they didn't make a mistake. They said, "You took the seashore test and you only missed two." You ever heard of the seashore test?

RB: No, sir.

ED: Well, we had to take this for CW, ?Constant? Wave radio, and I only missed two. So I wanted to get in a band, and I went to the adjoining air base. My primary air base was Santa Maria, California. And there was an adjoining air base, a bomber air base, and an order came over for some musicians. So I held up my hand or turned I in my name, and I went over and (chuckles) they gave me papers for transfer to their band! But the CO

[Commanding Officer] wouldn't allow it, he wouldn't allow it. *[aside about tape]* Do you want to make a change there or something?

RB: No, sir.

ED: Oh. So I carried these papers that transferred around when I was washed out, and I finally got in a band. I was in Yuma, Arizona.

[Son-in-law Carl Grass enters, greetings exchange and incidental conversation occurs]

RB: So you were playing in a band?

ED: Oh, they had a *terrific* band out there. These were all officers, all musicians from the West Coast, and Yuma, Arizona, is real close there, you know, and they get a three-day pass and they go in. So they had four dance bands within this big band, and we had special uniforms we wore. We had pips. We were no officers, but we had pips, you know. And when Arnold would show up someplace, we'd have to get on a plane and fly there. And when Arnold got off the plane, we were playing, you know. And we'd go to Watertown, North Dakota, down to Texas. We had to wear our pips when we went down South, because it was warm, and we had to wear our ODs [olive drabs] when we went north! (laughter) But this was a great experience, and I played with some *wonderful* musicians.

And that was where I got interested in radio, you know, we were so used to these musicians and they worked on radio stations, and I heard all this stuff, you know, and I got interested in radio.

RB: Now, how would you say your interest in music... How much of it would you say was influenced by the local scene around here?

ED: The local scene?

RB: Yes. Local *music* scene.

ED: Well, my sister organized a small band, and we used to play for all the picnics for miles around. So they all had picnics in the summertime, you know. Of course I was the leading trumpet player -- I'm not bragging, but I was her protégé, you know.

RB: How old were you then?

(ED laughs)

RB: That was before. We're talking about before the service?

ED: Oh yeah, before I got to high school. You know, this is ?older? grade school. And I had four brothers, and they all played instruments. So we had this little band and my sister used to feature me. My first touch of jazz was "Down Among the Sugar Cane." They all used to clap, and I'd get up and play this "Down Among the Sugar Cane."

RB: Where did you learn that song from? Where did you pick it up?

ED: Well, that was popular music them days. That was the number one song, yeah.

RB: That must have been in the '20s, in the 1920s.

[Tape Counter 493; End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Tape Counter 000; Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

RB: And then went into....

ED: I was still in the Air Force.

RB: Into Intelligence.

ED: Yeah, G2.

RB: While you were playing music, were you also doing some intelligence work, too?

ED: I worked in a library, and I used to have to check out the pilots that were going overseas with this restricted material. And I had a big safe, and I had to let them come in and review this material. Had to lock it up. And then we'd get an order to come through to destroy certain materials. I'd have to put my gun on, go out and dig a big hole and burn it and stand there 'til every piece burned -- guard it. And it seemed stupid to me (laughs), but that was the rule.

And then, of course, I got in the band. The last three months I was in the service, I got in this band on the base -- dance band, I'm talking about -- you know, I was in the band all the time. But this dance band, we used to have to play -- they had four officers' clubs -- we used to have to play for Officers' Club #1, Officers' Club #2... (laughs) But played a big band! You know, big band, because they had all these musicians out there from the West Coast.

RB: And so did you stay in the Air Force until the war was over?

ED: No, I was let out, and they shipped me over to Phoenix, and then they released a lot of guys, and I was one of them. But...

Let's see. I had a thought I was going to tell you. What the hell was it?

RB: About this dance band?

ED: Yeah, that was... Well, that was the band, and out of the band they had a dance band. And they had the marching band, Arnold's band, and if you were a musician, you were

called on as many different occasions to do this, do that. You blow up [sound the raising of] the flag or retreat.

Retreat, I want to tell you about. When I went to Europe, I bought an instrument over there, a trumpet, and I bought it from the Meah. French Besson trumpet. And the brass... The French were known to have the reputation to have the best brass in the world! So this Meah French brass company made all these instruments, and I heard about it, knew about it. And I made it imperative that I pick up one of these instruments over there. And I paid thirty dollars for it. When I got back to the United States, New York, I took it down to Carl Fischer Music Store... And I got it in brass, not lacquered, not finished. ?It made it? sticky, and it looked dirty, and I had my old trumpet case, you know. I traded in my old trumpet on it, for thirty dollars difference. And when I came through Customs, they opened the case and said, "Oh, you've got a French instrument in there. I said, "I played it all my life." They looked at my old trumpet case and said, "Okay, go on." So I didn't have to pay any customs. And I took it down to Carl Fischer Music Store in New York and had it appraised. I asked them what the value was. They wanted to buy it from me, \$400. I've still got the instrument.

When I was standing retreat one day... You know, they have an inspector that comes around and inspects it during retreat. And you have to hold up the instrument, turn it this way and that way and put it back. The inspector said, "Do that again." I thought I screwed up. So I started doing it by the numbers: 1-2-3-4-5, you know, and put it back. He said, "See me at the band hall after inspection." And I thought, "What the hell did I do

wrong?!" (laughter) This is really funny. So I met him at the band hall. He said, "Are you the gentleman I told at retreat..." "Yeah." So he said, "Is that a company horn?" I said, "No, it's my personal horn." He said, "Where'd you get it?" I said, "I got it on a trip to Europe." He said, "Well, you want to sell it?" And I said, "No, I don't want to sell it." And he said, "Well, take my card. I'm playing in the studios out here on the West Coast. If you ever change your mind, let me be the first. I'll give you a good price for it." And so he recognized the Meah. He thought it might be a company instrument and he was going to get it.

RB: Right. How do you spell that?

ED: M-E-A-H, Meah French Besson. French Besson. They blew it up during the war. I guess they rebuilt it again, but it made *all* the musicians sick. They blew it up during the war.

RB: The factory?

ED: The factory.

RB: And where was that factory again?

ED: Well, I bought it in Paris. I bought it from a music store in Paris.

RB: But the factory itself was...

ED: Factory was probably right around there somewhere, I don't know.

RB: But they blew it up.

ED: Blew it up, yeah. I don't know where the factory was. I *think* it was in Paris, though, I think it was.¹ That's an interesting tidbit I thought I'd... Oh, I got a lot of them. You don't have enough tape.

RB: Well, at any rate, you got out of the Air Force. Did you come straight home when you came home to Ste. Genevieve?

ED: I came home, yeah. I knew a lot of musicians before and after the war, and I imported musicians and had my band here. I had two of my brothers playing in the band, but the rest of them were all imported, and we played five states from here. We played Kentucky, Tennessee, and all around, out of here.

RB: So eventually you decided to go ahead and get a radio station.

ED: Well, after the war -- that was before I built the radio station... I had the band, but then I continued the band, you know, for years, up 'til 1957. And you know, I couldn't remember when I quit playing. People would ask me, "Well, when did you quit?" So I had this trailer out in this barn out here, so I had a friend call me one day and said, "You still got that trailer?" He said he had a dance band too. As a matter of fact, he played with me, he went to college. He said, "I would like to buy it." I said, "Well, don't come up and look at it 'til I clean it up." So I went out and looked at it and the license plate on it was 1957. (laughs)

RB: So that's the date! (laughter)

¹ Gustave August Besson had musical instrument factories in Paris, France and London, England, along with "depots in many other cities including Bruxelles, Charleroi, Madrid, and Barcelona."
http://www.angelfire.com/music2/thecornetcompendium/new_page_8.html Accessed July 30, 2003

ED: That was it.

RB: Why did you stop at that time?

ED: Got too busy doing other things. While I was on the road as a musician, we used to play in a lot of these caves around. They had a dance floor in there and had their air conditioning in the summer, you know, in these caves. And the one that struck my fancy was Dunbar Cave in Clarksville, Tennessee. It was owned by Roy Acuff, and they had 5,000 people out there every weekend. And I got thinking: When I was an altar boy back home, the priest took us out to this cave in Ste. Genevieve -- they called it Saltpeter Cave -- for an altar boy picnic. And we had to walk about three miles to get to it. There was no road, so...

Is this interesting enough for you to [record]?

RB: Sure, definitely.

ED: Okay. So I remembered this cave, and I thought, "Man, there's a jewel back in Ste. Genevieve, you know. As a matter of fact, it'd put Dunbar Cave to shame!" So when I got back, the first thing I did, I looked up the people who owned this cave, and there was an adjoining 155 acres. My father was still living then, and I bought this piece of property, and I told my dad, "We're so close to St. Louis that this is a natural. This is going to be a moneymaker." So we went out there -- my dad was still living -- and we got Bloomsdale Excavating Company to come and build a road for us down into this cave. They had to do a lot of blasting and everything, you know, and they built this road down into the cave. And then we were going to pour a big slab in there and have all our

concessions and your bandstand and everything. But there was four places where if you had a hard rain, you couldn't get across. They did build a road, finally, out there. So I went back to the county commissioners and I asked them if they had any plans of putting any low-water bridges in out there, and they said, "Oh yes, it's in our plans. We got school kids out there we got to get out." You know? So I went and had a lake built up at the upper end of the cave. We were going to light the cave and go through the cave, come out at this lake, see? So I had a company from Perryville come up here and build this seven-acre lake, and had the road built down in there. And my dad had a lot of equipment, and we cleaned off a big parking lot. And I went back year after year to the court [county commissioners] and they said, "Yes, it's still in our plans. We just don't have the money." So I said, "Well, I want to commercialize this cave out there. We got a good thing for the county here." So, "Oh, we'll go... Next year or two we'll have that road, we'll have those four low-water bridges in there for you." So I went to talk to Citizen's Electric and they put in the electric, put in a big transformer. I never used a watt, never used a kilowatt. For *years* I paid them, I paid them every month. I don't know how many years it was, and nothing, nothing ever happened. Now, four years ago, they put in those low-water bridges. Can you believe that?

RB: When did you start on this?

ED: That was right after I came home off the road. Before I built the radio station.

RB: What, it'd have been 1958, you mean? Somewhere around [that]?

ED: Oh, boy... Oh, it was before then. I could look up my records and I could tell. And just recently I sold it. And I had cards, pictures, from Dunbar Cave and everything to show this guy. And a slick realtor came along and he said, "I'd like to look at this property." And I took him out and showed it to him. He said, "I can sell it for you in two months." Nobody had ever approached me about buying it, you know. So I'd been thinking about my estate, and my estate taxes, and I thought, "Well, it's not making me a dime." I had it in a program with the Commission, the Conser...

RB: Conservation?

ED: Conservation. And they were paying me a few dollars a year to keep it in grass and keep it in... And I had another man, we were splitting the money. He took care of the place. Everybody and his brother went out there and fished in my lake. And then I was down in Perryville one day selling advertising for my radio station. I had the radio station then. And I heard a rumor. I talked to some people and they said, "I heard the sheriff in Ste. Gen County raided a cave up at Ste. Genevieve. A bunch of youngsters were in there, and they confiscated about seven cases of beer and run them out of there." So I didn't tell them that I owned a cave. So when I got home I called the sheriff and he said, "Yeah, the parents are defending the children and we can't do a thing. We just run them off, but we can't file any charges. We didn't have a warrant from you. Hell, half of them were your relatives!" (laughter)

RB: Well, if you had commercialized, that'd be the same thing that would've been going on! (laughter) You would have had a party out there anyway! (laughs)

ED: Yeah.

RB: Boy, that would have been a nice operation, though.

ED: Yeah. So I sold it, and the wife and I took a drive out there to the new owner, and he's building a mansion out there! He's building a mansion! Right above the lake. Beautiful setting, it's an ideal place to build it. I asked him if he's going commercialize it. He said, well, he didn't know. He said, "It's always there if I want to." But it's beautiful -- huge opening, you know.

RB: It's pretty close to Ste. Genevieve?

ED: Yeah, it's about seven or eight miles. Right off the interstate! It would have been a... It's still valuable, but I sold it too cheap. This twenty-eight percent right off the top capital gains tax. In the last six months I've sold three pieces of property. See this store back over here? That used to be a furniture store. I didn't operate it as a furniture store, I rented it. But I sold that. And I sold a lot out on Highway 61, and I sold the Saltpeter Cave. And boy, that capital gains tax -- twenty-eight percent right off the top.

RB: Right.

ED: But I'm getting my estate down. If something happens to me, I don't want the wife to have all these problems. See this medical arts building? I own that. See that apartment building over there? Built in 1830. I own *that*. And I own a big farm out here, ninety-eight acres. And I've got to get my estate down to where the government won't take everything! You know?

RB: Sure, that's right.

ED: And I'm gifting the limit every year to my grandchildren and my two children. I have two children.

RB: When did Elmo come...? Was Elmo the first?

ED: Yeah, he was the first.

RB: Is he a Junior?

ED: No.

RB: How did that work out?

ED: My name is Elmer, not *Elmo*, but the American Legion, during the World War, made such a joke of the name "Elmer" -- it was a German name, you know -- and everything, "Where's Elmer?" It was *oh*, just...! So when I had my band, I changed my name to *Elmo*. I didn't want everybody laughing, you know, so I changed my name to Elmo. And when Elmo was born, we named *him* Elmo. Then when he went on the radio, I told him, "Look, I'm not responsible for what you say on the radio. You got to change your name. Not legally, but professionally, change it to Bob Scott." (laughs) So see, everybody knows me as Elmo -- they don't even know Elmer's my right name, unless something legal goes on. So I still go by Elmo. And my band, you know, I changed the name.

RB: So he worked on the radio station as Bob Scott?

ED: Yeah. They don't know him as Elmo! (laughs) They know him as Bob Scott.

RB: Now, his name is Elmo L. What is the "L" for?

ED: Lawrence. My dad's name was Lawrence.

RB: I see, uh-huh. Do you have a middle name?

ED: Lawrence.

RB: Your middle name is... So you're Elmer L., and he's *Elmo* L.

ED: Right.

RB: Okay. So it's not really a Junior.

ED: No.

RB: Almost. (laughter) When was he born?

ED: Oh, you got me. He's in [his] '40s now.

RB: Were you in the radio business yet?

ED: Well, I had a little physical ailment when he was in college, and he came home to help out at the radio station. And he loved radio so much that he didn't go back to school. He wouldn't go back to college. He said, "I want to stay in radio, and this is the best place to get my experience." When he was fourteen years old, you had to have a restricted ticket to work on a radio station. Everybody had to have a restricted ticket. The exam was a little rough, you know. You had to take it in front of a FCC [Federal Communications Commission] examiner, and a couple times a year they had the exam in St. Louis at the federal building. So we coached him a little bit and he studied and he learned all the rules and everything, and I took him up to take the exam. At the same time there were a lot of elderly people there, grown-ups taking the exam. He went up and turned in his paper and he stood in line with the rest of them. He was fourteen. You have to be fourteen years old before you can take this exam. And he passed, and the inspector looked over -- he

was a real little guy, he was taller than I am, though -- and he said, "Very good, son."

And a lot of the older people [who had] come up didn't pass. (laughs) But he passed!

RB: Fourteen years old!

ED: Yeah. (With emotion) That tickled me to death. And he stayed in radio, stayed in, and when I... 1987, see, I had the cable TV, had the AM [radio station] and I had the 100,000-watt FM. And I sold all three to one man in a package. But all they were interested in was the FM, moved it to St. Louis. So I knew nothing about St. Louis marketing or nothing. Well, what brought this all about was the FCC passed some new rules and regulations. If you owned a 100,000-watt station, you had to go to a tower height of 1,000 feet above average terrain. And I only had a 300-foot tower out here. So they gave us three years to accomplish this. So I had several areas engineered -- didn't work. And you had to have three-phase power to run a 100,000-watt FM station. A lot of places you'd see a hill out here or something, and it had to be so far from an interstate, it had to be so far from the river, and it had to be... There were a lot of restrictions on where you could build it. So I was about running out of time, and I located a place up near St. Louis, in Hillsboro, Missouri. And I'd follow the three-phase lines, and I was driving down the road one day out in the country, and following a three-phase line, and just stopped right there. I said, "This is as far as I can go." I looked over in the field, [and] there was a man over there with some horses. I walked over and I introduced myself and I told him what I was looking for, [that] I was looking for a place. And he said, "You came to the right place. I got this property from my in-laws. I came up here

from Oklahoma. The only thing I know [how] to do is to raise horses. If you're interested..." I said, "I'd like an option." I told him the story and he says, "Well, let's go downtown and work out an option." We went down to a realtor and worked out an option and I optioned his piece of property. So then I got thinking about it, "Boy, that's going to take a lot of money to build this station up here, and we'll make it a St. Louis market station." See, you can only move a station so far, until you offer objectionable interference to someone *else*. And that's the reason you have to go through all this expensive engineering, consulting engineers, to have all this accomplished. So I was about run out of money with these engineers, you know. So I found out there was a company looking for a radio station in St. Louis, and I got in touch with them. And they came down, and I showed them this piece of property, and boy, they went out and got it like that! I had the engineering. Everything was worked up, but I was running out of time. So I thought, "Well, I'm not going to just give away the FM. I'm going to give away everything if I can in one package." So I sold it in one package.

RB: What was the call number of that FM station?

ED: [It was] 105.7. The call [letters were] KSGM

RB: That was KSGM?

ED: Yeah. KSGM-AM and KSGM-FM -- call signals were KSGM. So then when the owner... He spun off the cable system to Falcon Cable, and he spun off the AM... No, he *kept* the AM and he tried to operate from St. Louis. People down here, you know, in and out. He made my son the manager, and he kept the thing running for him. And then

eventually my son bought the AM back. See, the AM towers were across from Chester, Illinois, four miles from Chester, Illinois, down in the bottom. And I started with 250 watts up there on a hill. And I knew that wasn't going to go too far, so I changed the frequency to 980 -- it used to be 1450 [at] 250 watts -- and I changed the frequency to 980 [at] 500 watts. But I wanted 1,000 watts. So to get a 1,000 watts to fit in the propagation of stations I had to move further south. So I found this farm down in Perry County. It was on a corner, it was a good location, and I had it re-engineered, and we built the AM down there -- the towers and the transmitter site. We had three studios: we had one in my Monitor building in Perryville, we had one in Chester, and we had one in Ste. Genevieve. And the Commission... We had to re-license it for Chester, Illinois, because that was the nearest incorporated city. There's a little town north of my tower, called McBride, but it wasn't incorporated. So we had to license it to Chester, Illinois, but it was still KSGM. It alienated *some* people, but they realized we still had the studio here, and this was the main office. And so we had three studios that were right on the river, see. And to do business over in Illinois, you got to have representation. So we still maintained them. My son still maintains that studio over there.

Then in 1993, the flood came along, and pow! Washed it all out. And they wouldn't permit him to build it back. It's considered a wetlands now.

RB: Is it still called KSGM?

ED: No, no. See, there's no KSGM anymore. So in the meantime, my son built the FM in Perryville, KBDZ. It's 93.1. That's what you were listening to there. But it took him four

years to get the engineering approved to build that station. So thank goodness he had something to fall back on. Now he just recently filed back for the AM, but he couldn't buy any property! People there have moved out of the bottom. You know, they made wetlands out of it and everything. They went to the hills to buy property, and people raised the price so high that... And they wouldn't even sell it, you know. So he finally found a farm where he could buy, and he had it engineered and they're still in the engineering works. But thank goodness he had started the FM, but it took him four years to get the FM on the air in Perryville.

RB: So when you first began, was it KSGM?

ED: Yeah, definitely, yeah.

RB: What year was that, that you started?

ED: [In] '47.

RB: [In] 1947. You were interested in the Guignolée? Was it '49 that you made those recordings?

ED: Yeah, it was a later year. It was after we had the radio station on the air, yeah.

RB: What sort of music were you playing in those days, in '47.

ED: We were playing big band!

RB: When you started in '47, you were playing big band?

ED: Yeah.

RB: Were you more interested in that music...? Did you also have news shows and any other kind of talk radio or any...? There wasn't anything like that?

ED: Oh, we had a conglomeration of everything you could think of! We had more programming, different programs. Everything was based on programming, yeah. Well, news, of course, is important. But we did local news from Ste. Gen., local news from Chester, local news from Perryville.

RB: Right. So in a way, you were in the news business in radio, and then you saw this opportunity in the newspaper business.

ED: And I bought the newspaper.

RB: Now, what year was that, that you bought that from the Zoellner brothers?

ED: Yeah, nineteen-sixty.... Must have been '62, I guess. Gosh, I should have... I don't even know where... Perry County Sun. This was the paper I bought. This was all hand set type. Can you imagine that?

RB: Yeah, that's amazing.

[Tape Counter 473; End of Tape 1, Side 2]

[Tape Counter 000; Begin Tape 2, Side 1]

RB: And it was the Zoellner brothers, and they owned this Perry County Sun, and that had been going for quite some time, hadn't it? It's an old...

ED: Yeah, after this... This Perry County Sun, yeah.

RB: Right. What kind of equipment did they have to print at the time that you bought it?

ED: Well, we bought their old letterpress -- you know, handfed letterpress.

RB: What did you know about the newspaper business at that time?

ED: Well, I didn't know *anything* about it. I had a couple of boys up here, friends of mine, they worked at a local newspaper. I took them down here and put them to work for me.

They were experienced. We went to the Globe-Democrat in St. Louis and bought linotypes. They had *one* linotype, and it was broke down half the time. So I bought two used linotypes from the Globe-Democrat.

RB: And you changed the name, is that correct?

ED: To the Monitor.

RB: To the Monitor, in 1962.

ED: I'm not sure about that. Early '60s, yeah -- '61 or '62, right in there someplace.

RB: And you had two fellows, you say, that were from Ste. Genevieve?

ED: Two Wehmeyer brothers.

RB: They were experienced?

ED: In the newspaper business, right. They were running a local newspaper.

RB: Which one did they work for?

ED: Ste. Gen Herald.

RB: So they went on with the Sun, which was later to become The Monitor.

ED: They joined me, yeah. They were glad to get away from over here.

RB: (chuckles) They were? Were they working as editors, or what were their roles?

ED: Well, "Wally" Wehmeyer [Wallace Joseph] and "Kayly" [phonetic spelling; given name is James, also known as "Jim"] Wehmeyer was the second. Wally was the oldest, and Wally, he was the editor. We maintained one of the Zoellners in our shop, and we hired some other younger people from Perryville, and we put out a good quality newspaper.

RB: What was your specific interest in newspaper? Why did you decide to go...?

ED: Well, I always had an interest in newspaper, you know. It intrigued me, really. And I thought, "Well, here's a good opportunity, and working with the radio. We can give these Republicans a rough way to go." And we *did*!

RB: (laughs)

ED: We put every man on the city council, a Democrat. First time in history it was ever accomplished.

RB: And that was in the city council of Perryville?

ED: Yeah. Well, through manipulation, you know, and plugging and advertising.

RB: So you see there's a definite role between newspapers and politics? There's a relationship there between...?

ED: Yeah, oh, yeah! Tied in beautifully!

RB: And they had another paper there, which was Republican, that was *called* The Republican.

ED: Perry County Republican, yeah.

RB: At the time that you took over the Sun, was that Republican...?

ED: Democrat! It was a Democrat.

RB: Uh-huh, but the Sun was a Democratic paper. How was it compared to The Republican?

ED: No comparison.

RB: Was it not strong or...?

ED: No.

RB: The Republican was stronger?

ED: Yeah. See, my wife was a photographer, and then I got pictures like that. The only way you could get a picture in a paper in Perryville was if you had a picture made and took it to them, and then waited two weeks 'til they had a... What do you call it?

RB: Lithograph?

ED: Engraving made. And they used to have to go to Cape to have the engraving made and then to get it back, it'd take them two weeks. And my wife, I'd get a picture, and boy, we came out with pictures! The Republican newspaper didn't even own a camera! So we put them on the ball.

RB: Right.

ED: My son has made the Herald and made the Perry County papers better newspapers, because he came in the business. They're better newspapers than they *ever were!* And that's what *I* did when I started *my* paper -- I put them all on the ball. And I was the first one to go offset.

RB: When did that happen?

ED: Oh boy, you got me. I didn't have an offset press -- I had adjusto-writers, you know. I don't know what you call them today. See, everything's computer today.

Before you leave, I want to take you out to the radio station and show you my son's newspaper setup. He composes the paper up here, but he's got his office in Perryville -- oh, *three* offices, you know -- there's three offices. But he *lives* in Perryville. And that's where he bought the paper from. Basically, it's a Perryville newspaper, but he

runs it both counties. He has as much advertising in Ste. Genevieve as he has in Perryville.

RB: Did you do any writing? Were you interested in doing writing [for the paper]?

ED: I didn't do much writing, no.

RB: But when you had meetings, did the editor have control over all of that? Or did you all have meetings that you...? Because as you mentioned, the importance of the newspaper in local...

ED: I was in and out of there every day. You know, I sold advertising around these three towns, and I'd go in and I'd tell them, "Here's a story. Let's get this. It's a good story." And I carried a camera with me, and I carried in pictures, you know. Of course I'd bring them up here, [my] wife would develop them in that...

RB: Darkroom downstairs.

ED: ...room she had down there. And I'd get them down to Cape and we'd get an engraving back. And that picture that we have out on the wall after that boy was electrocuted...?

RB: Yes.

ED: I was under the pole when he was electrocuted. It was after a storm, because I was out there taking pictures, and he thought he was working on a dead line, and 7,900 volts hit him. He fell back, the wrench was still in his hand. I had photographs of them taking him down and everything -- had a whole page full of pictures. And the family called me and said, "Don't put any of those pictures in the paper." And those were all engravings -- I had a fortune spent on that. And I couldn't put those in the paper. I *could* have -- but

you know, you can't suppress the news -- but as a favor to them, I didn't do it. So I released the negatives to United Press, and the first week, it made fifty-some metropolitan papers, daily papers. And I got five dollars for it! (chuckles)

To tell you something interesting, a friend of mine who graduated from Missouri U. was over at Missouri U. for some annual thing, and he was over there, and he saw this huge photograph [with] my name on it, "The Shock that Killed." And he called me on the phone from Waterloo, Illinois. That's where he lived and where he was operating a newspaper. He said, "I saw your photograph over at Columbia." I said, "You did? Photograph of what?" He said, "The Shock that Killed." I still didn't know what he was talking about. He said, "You made a photograph of a man that was electrocuted on a pole." And I said, "Yeah." He said, "That's what I'm talking about." I said, "Who had it there?" He said, "Encyclopedia Britannica!" Had a blowup that big.

RB: Was that was during the '60s or '70s?

ED: Oh, you got me on these dates. You know, I don't know if you ever heard of this or not, but I have a hearing loss, I have head noise. You ever hear of head noise?

RB: I'm not too familiar with it, no sir.

ED: Nothing they can do for you. And that's my impediment, is head noise. (sigh) Nothing they can do for it. So it's affected my memory.

RB: But now going back to The Monitor, then, when you were working with The Monitor, you were taking photographs too? And your wife as well?

ED: Oh yeah! Day and night, yeah.

RB: And your wife as well?

ED: Well, the wife, she wasn't taking any photographs. Oh, she did occasionally, but I was the photographer. We had one camera, and I took all the photographs. They were busy doing other things, you know.

And then I saw there was an opportunity to take on another printing job.

Oh boy, things are going to break loose now -- the grandchildren are coming in from school.

RB: (laughing) Right! Right.

ED: Boy, they hit here, refrigerator.

RB: Yeah, this is an important spot, the kitchen.

ED: Well, they go in and watch TV. The wife fixes stuff for them to eat.

[Brief conversation with grandson omitted.]

RB: Mr. Donze, you were talking about The Monitor. How long did you keep that now?

ED: Oh... *[pauses, thinking]*

RB: And then your son took over?

ED: No, he didn't take over The Monitor. He owned this in later years.

RB: Yeah, he bought...

ED: No, I sold The Monitor to Paul Pautler, a local boy from here who graduated from Missouri U. And when I sold it to him, he knew nothing about offset. He wouldn't buy my offset equipment. He stayed with the letterpress. I had a beautiful letterpress plant, you know -- but he wouldn't buy the offset equipment.

RB: And things were going to offset at that time?

ED: Yeah! Yeah. And so I guess less than a year later, he *had* to go to offset -- everybody else was going to offset! And he went to offset. And I had to sell my adjusto-writers and all my composing equipment and everything [as] used equipment, lost money on it.

RB: Then the offset, that came in, in...

ED: Boy, you got me. We didn't print the paper, you know, we'd take it to Cape Girardeau and have it printed. The first printing I did offset was: There was a monthly tabloid [The Mariner] published by the Knights of Columbus. It was being printed in Cape Girardeau, and they had some office changes down there and people replaced some people. They wanted to get rid of this paper, so I took it over. And I got their addressograph and everything. And so I used to go to Washington, Missouri, and have this printed by offset, and I'd take a truck over there, and I have to haul all these papers back. They had a *big* circulation, and in the wintertime, a lot of these people would go to Florida, and we had all these address changes. We had this addressograph that was pretty -- it helped us, you know. It was fast. So we used the same addressograph with *my* paper, The Monitor. It was a good piece of business. It's still being printed in Perryville. The Wehmeyers have took it over, the ones that worked for me.

RB: Uh-huh, so they've been in the newspaper business for a long time.

ED: Yeah. The older one died. The younger one's still operating it. They have a printing plant here and a printing plant in Perryville.

RB: But you say it was sold to a syndicate?

ED: A syndicate owns it now, yeah.

RB: What's the name?

ED: I don't know. My son knows, but I don't know.

RB: But the Wehmeyer [family] is still involved in it?

ED: No, Wehmeyer is not the syndicate. No, they have a printing plant, and the only thing they print is this tabloid yet for the Knights of Columbus, plus job work. You know, what you call job work. They have a printing plant up here, but all they do is job printing. But the tabloid for the Knights of Columbus is still being printed in Perryville in their little shop.

RB: And that's what this Wehmeyer is still involved with?

ED: Yeah, Wehmeyer's continued. Yeah.

RB: But the syndicate eventually bought The Republican...

ED: And The Monitor.

RB: And The Monitor. Now let me ask you this: you said that when you got into the newspaper business, The Republican was strong.

ED: Right.

RB: And you got in there and The Monitor became strong as a Democratic paper.

ED: Right.

RB: Now, when the syndicate takes over, and they buy *both* papers, what politics do *they* operate under?

ED: Well, I think it's still Republican. They don't call it a Democrat newspaper. It comes out on Thursday. Well, their paper comes out on Tuesday -- The Republican comes out on Tuesday, and The Monitor comes out on Thursday. It's still a Republican county, but Republican county comes before our good Lord down there. And my son remembers my stories, you know, and that's why he thought he would be interested in newspaper, the work I did and accomplish what I accomplished. So he's working very hard. He's got a good quality newspaper, but he can't come up to the other one, and he can't come up to The Herald here, because The Herald is *strictly* Ste. Gen County. And The Republican is strictly Perry County. And he is dealing in both. He thought he could... But he's made them better papers, you know. Years ago, when my brother and I started, we had a little drugstore. We started this drugstore, and The Herald was the weekly paper. Kroger Store -- we called it Donze Cut Rate, and they used to put our ad on the front page. (laughter)

RB: The Herald would?

ED: Yeah!

RB: (laughs) How about competition now? Is there a certain amount of competition between...?

ED: There's strict competition in newspapers around there, yeah. This way, that way, every way. Perry County, Cape County -- there's a lot of competition.

RB: How did The Herald turn out? Did it seem to support one or another political side?

ED: Well, yeah, they've been Republican, I guess. [*Speaking to his wife, Betty Donze*] Boop, hasn't The Herald always been Republican?

BD: I would think so. Now, what was Alvin? Alvin was The Fair Play.

ED: There used to be another paper. What was Alvin's paper's name?

BD: The Fair Play.

ED: Fair Play. It was The Fair Play. The Herald took over the Fair Play. It was by a Mr. Petrequin, and he was a Democrat, yeah. But The Herald has always been a Republican [newspaper] as I recall. And then The Herald took over the Fair Play when he passed away.

RB: Okay, so Petrequin had the Fair Play, and it was more or less Democrat then at that time.

ED: Right.

RB: So The Herald changed...?

ED: At one time there were *seven* newspapers in Ste. Genevieve!

RB: *Seven* of them!

ED: Can you imagine that?! It was one of these political things, when they'd come out with a constitutional amendment or something -- newspapers would spring up to get that money. And one time there was seven papers in Ste. Genevieve. Can you imagine that? Oh, just little weekly things, you know.

RB: But they have a point of view, and they want to share a certain point of view with the community.

ED: Right.

RB: Well, that's one role of the newspaper, I guess, is to share a certain point of view. And that's what I wonder about, when a syndicate takes over any number of papers, it seems like just *one* point of view can be...

ED: Yeah. Well, syndicates are -- they're [newspapers] all operated by local people, you know, but a syndicate owns them. I don't know if they have much to say about...

RB: The editorials?

ED: ...the editorials or not, I don't know.

RB: So there still can be editorial freedom...?

ED: Oh hell, yeah.

RB: ...within a syndicate.

ED: Yeah, yeah.

RB: I see. So is that local syndicate here that...?

ED: No, no, no. I don't even know where they're out of, but they own a slew of papers.

I showed your letter to my son, but "I don't have time," he said. "Sorry, just don't have time."

RB: He's very busy, and I'm sure at this time of the year, too.

ED: He's coming up today with a lot of Perryville news and stuff, and they put it together up here.

RB: They put it up, up over here?

ED: Yeah.

RB: So his operation today, he's got a radio station, and what's the call [letters] again?

ED: KBDZ.

RB: And it's an AM?

ED: FM.

RB: It's an FM station.

ED: Yeah. He lost the AM, see. He lost KSGM.

RB: But he's trying to get a...

ED: Another new license.

RB: A new license for AM?

ED: He still retains his old license. He pays all the fees and everything and follows the rules and regulations of the license, you know, but he hasn't been able to file for a construction permit with the proper place without offering objectionable interference to this station or that station.

RB: It's hard to find a place.

ED: Hard to find! Fit it in. Because of it was a tight fit I had to put it years ago, and some things are grandfathered, and some things are not. But the FCC is -- it's turnaround and everything. You know, duopoly used to be out of the question. Now you can own a half a dozen stations in one city. It's *all* changed.

RB: Yeah. Can you recall back...? This question I had -- I was curious -- what was your connection at that time when you did that recording with the La Guignolée group? Did you just know about them, or did you have some friends in that group?

ED: Well, I'll tell you the story. I kept telling the fellows, I said -- I knew a lot of these guys, they were singers, they were all Frenchmen -- and I said, "Why don't we make a record? You know, we'll have them printed. It'll be good for the community." "Well, yeah, we'll do it someday, we'll get together someday." So I couldn't get them together. This went on for a couple of years. So I got an idea. These are all Frenchmen, they liked to drink wine, so I got a couple gallons of wine and went out to the studio and I called them and I told them, I said, "We've got to get this record made, and I've got a couple gallons of wine up here, sitting on the piano." So I took my car and I went around and I picked them all up. A lot of them were old guys, you know. And we finally got them together, made this record. And then the same thing happened across the river. Went over to Prairie du Rocher, Illinois, and I told them, I said, "We'd like to make a record for you guys over here." And they said, "Well, it's so hard to get the guys together." I said, "I've got an idea. Let's go out to the firehouse and let's get a few cases of beer, or somebody get a gallon of wine, bring a gallon of wine out -- you'll get them out there." So we did that! (laughter) And we got a record made over in Prairie du Rocher.

RB: So did you bring the equipment in there?

ED: Yeah! Oh, we brought recording equipment in.

RB: What kind of recording equipment?

ED: Tape -- just old tape.

RB: Reel to reel?

ED: Reel to reel, yeah. So (chuckles) we made *that* accomplishment.

RB: So in Prairie du Rocher, it was in was in a firehouse? That's where you all recorded...

ED: Yeah, went to the firehouse.

RB: How about here in Ste. Genevieve, where did you all record?

ED: _____ studio.

RB: And that was located...?

ED: Out here on the hill out here.

RB: There was a Bloomsdale group, too, right?

ED: Yeah, we made a record for a Bloomsdale group. But I don't know how we made it. Oh!

They came in here. They came in here, yeah.

RB: Was it the same sort of deal where you got them together?

ED: No, I don't... Maybe, I can't remember. But that was an easy deal. There was no problem. We put the word out we'd like to make a record for them. Did you get a record of the Bloomsdale group?

RB: I have heard a cassette tape recording from the original seventy-eight [78 rpm record].

ED: I had them made in St. Louis, all the...

RB: That's what I wanted to ask you. Then you brought the tape to St. Louis?

ED: Yeah, took it to St. Louis. What was the name of that company? I've forgot now.

Imperial? I think it was. So you had to have a certain amount made at the time. I'll tell you more of the story.

So I had these records made and we advertised them on the radio, and people would come and buy them, you know, at seventy-five cents or fifty cents maybe. Maybe

they were fifty cents, I guess, we started out. So one day there's a committee came over to the radio station, these Frenchmen that had made this record, and they said, "We hear you're making a lot of money out of this." And I said, "You *hear* that, but let me show you the books on it." So I showed them. "Now, if you want to pay for the mother record, and you want to pay for this, and you want to pay for that, you can take all the books and take all the records and make all the money out of them you can make." They turned their tails around and left, they wouldn't have anything to do with it. So I was stuck. I've had my closets full of records for *years*, you know. It's getting down now to where... I'll go get you a couple of them.

RB: Do you still have any of the seventy-eights?

ED: There may be one or two around somewhere, but I'd have to look for them. Forty-fives, I've got forty-fives.

RB: So anyway, it wasn't a moneymaking deal.

ED: Oh, no, not at all. I had a lot of money stuck *in* it, you know. They charged me an enormous fee to have the mother record made, you know, in St. Louis. And then you had to buy 500 or something like that, at a time. And if you had to repress, why, it was expensive too.

RB: Well, you must have had to have it redone into forty-five at one time.

ED: Yeah.

RB: That must have been later, I guess, huh?

ED: Oh yeah. Yeah, when forty-fives came out, nobody wanted the seventy-eights anymore.

RB: Well, did you play it on your radio station?

ED: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, we sent them to KMOX [radio station in St. Louis] and we sent a lot of them these records and they played them at New Year's, yeah.

RB: Well, just to me, as an outsider who's been interested in Ste. Genevieve, of course La Guignolée is important still, today, for the town and everything. So that was a pretty important thing that you did back in '49.

ED: Well, did you ever see one of the forty-fives, all their names on it?

RB: Right, uh-huh.

ED: All Frenchmen -- everyone's a Frenchman. And they're all dead now.

RB: They're all gone now, right.

ED: They're all gone, that's a collector's item.

RB: That's right. So that was important for the town.

ED: At that time, yeah. We don't sell many of them now. We put it on the radio, maybe we'll sell a half a dozen at the most. But it's a collector's item now.

RB: Well, so your son is still -- he's got the ambitions to go on with the newspaper *and* the radio.

ED: And he has a printing business also.

RB: So most of his operation is in Perryville, but he's got some here in Ste. Gen and he's got a station in Chester, did you say?

ED: Studio, just a studio. Local news, Ste. Gen local news, and Perryville. See, it's all done... He has (chuckles) microwaves, you know, back and forth, and he had a lot of line

charges. And he does sports over there on his FM, 'cause there's no AM now. Everything's on FM now, but it's all from three studios. And it's expensive! You got to have people, and you got to rent places, you know. He's renting in Perryville, and he's renting over in Chester. He owns the building here.

RB: How did you yourself get into the technical aspects: all this equipment and all the cable and all the...?

ED: Well, I was always intrigued, and when cable came along, I got intrigued in cable. I knew another radioman down in West Plains, Missouri, who built a cable system. And I'm trying to think of the year -- I don't know what the year was. In the middle '60s, I guess. So his name is Bob Nethery, and he owned several radio stations, and West Plains was his main one -- that's where he lived. He invited me down, and I went down to see his cable system.

[Tape Counter 484; End of Side 1]
[Tape Counter 000; Begin Tape 2, Side 2]

ED: ...seven dollars a month. And the postage, they raised the postage and other things -- raised the price, and I went over to City Council for a special meeting to see if I could get a dollar raise. I asked for a dollar additional. Boy, I thought they were going to give me the third degree! I finally got it, though. I had to do a lot of talking, but I got my eight dollars. But man, we were changing taps, we were changing this, we were changing that, all the time! I had a bucket truck. Man, I was climbing poles with a bucket truck. I was out there every day on that truck! Goll!

RB: (laughs) And at that time did you still have your radio station?

ED: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah! Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

RB: Were you still in the newspaper business too at that point in '73?

ED: No, I was out of it.

RB: You were out of it by that time?

ED: Yeah.

RB: You had sold to Pautler by that time.

ED: I sold it to Paul Pautler, yeah. He did pretty well with it when he started, was doing real well, but this syndicate came along and made him such a big offer that he let it go. And he's retired. He retired after he sold the paper, and he hasn't done any more work!

RB: Does he still live around here?

ED: He still lives in Perryville. He owns some property down there, bought a lot of property. I think it may have a subdivision on it, I don't know. But he was a local boy here, and my brother married his sister. We were all friends, you know, and then...

RB: Did you ever join the Missouri Press Association?

ED: Yeah! I was on the board of directors. Yeah, a couple of times.

RB: So that must have been during the '60s or '70s?

ED: (chuckles) *[pauses, thinking, unable to remember]*

RB: So that Missouri Press Association, it's not only people who went to school to study journalism?

ED: No. They tried to have one representative from this part of the state, *this* part of the state -- they pick them like that. But I never will forget when I was on the board of directors. To get together for a meeting, we used to have a telephone... What do you call it?

RB: A conference call?

ED: Conference call. No, I've got this mixed up with the radio committee thing. I was on the board of directors of the radio committee also. (laughs) At that time, they were trying to put a tax on records. The president of KMOX, the manager of KMOX, he got on the board and he claimed that their lawyers... We had a lot of money, and we used to handle advertising, some national advertising, which paid pretty good. And every member station got some of this advertising. And when they were trying to put this tax on records, why, the manager of KMOX said, "We got the lawyers, we'll take care of it." Well, it was taken care of, the year before and the year after, but they cleaned our treasure -- *cleaned* it, just cleaned our treasure, just *wiped* us out.

RB: That was a tax on each record?

ED: Yeah, try to put a sales tax on radio stations that used records.

RB: There's quite a bit of controversy now about ownership of songs and copyright and all that kind of stuff.

ED: Oh, there's always been that. You know what ruined the big bands?

RB: What was that?

ED: ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers.] ASCAP, BMI [Broadcast Music International,] and CISAC [Confederation Internationale des Societes

d'Auteurs et Compositeurs.]² That ruined the big bands! That *ruined* the big bands! They put such a tax on these hotels and places that used these orchestras, they couldn't afford it!

RB: And the band themselves, they wanted to play just any sort of thing that was in their repertoire.

ED: Yeah.

RB: (chuckling) You can't invent a whole new repertoire each time you...

ED: No. Well, this is such a good racket for ASCAP [and] BMI that several others tried to get in the business, but they couldn't swing it. I remember when CISAC first came to the United States, all they had was this church music. They sued KMOX -- they sued CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] for about \$6 million because they played one of the songs after a certain hour. And that's how they got in business. They got all this money, then they went to the East Coast, West Coast, and got these new young musicians, popular artists, and built their library. So now they're just as powerful as... Well, BMI is the most powerful now. ASCAP has all this *old* stuff. See, I was on the road as a musician when the radio stations put on an ASCAP ban. They wouldn't play anymore ASCAP music, because ASCAP was demanding so much royalties. And you'd hear "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" about ten times a day on every radio station, because there was only a limited small library that was Stephen Foster songs and stuff like that, that ASCAP didn't have control of. I was on the road as a musician at that time.

² In English, "International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers." Pronounced "See Sack."

RB: But as a station owner, did you have to pay?

ED: Oh, yeah, yeah! Station owners, yeah.

RB: But did you ever participate in that ban as a station owner?

ED: No. No, there never has been a ban as station owners, never has.

RB: They went along with it. I guess they're the ones that pay most of the...

ED: Oh, there's always court fights, and they want to raise the rates -- and they *do* raise the rates. And I had to contribute every year to this group that was fighting ASCAP. And ASCAP used to be the number one, you know, and then BMI came along with all this rock stuff, you know, and CISAC when they came to the United States with all this religious music. They owned the religious music, and then they got in the popular field. Out East there was a couple other companies trying to get started and we had letters come [that said] to "Don't pay them, don't pay them, don't pay them, don't pay them, don't pay them." So we didn't pay them, and they couldn't make it. They couldn't afford to pay the artists. Well, the artists get very little. I've got a friend I went to school with, a musician that works for Carl Fischer in New York. To this day he's still working for Carl Fischer. He belongs to ASCAP. He says he gets very little, very little.

RB: Well, of course. I don't know who gets the money, but...

ED: Jews. And I'll tell you, and *I know*.

RB: You mean the ones that are managing it or...?

ED: They've always controlled the music industry, the Jews have.

RB: I guess that's an untold story in this country, isn't it? They also have collected a lot of music.

ED: Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey -- all those guys were Jews. They changed their names, though, you know. But the band leaders... After all the time I've spent on the road, I finally realized I wasn't a Jew, and I would *never* make it to the top. I knew musicians that have come out of conservatory in Cincinnati and those places that were gentiles, couldn't make it, 'cause they weren't Jews.

RB: So that musical industry altogether, the entire industry is...

ED: Oh yeah. The smallest act to Hollywood -- they controlled it all. *[pause]* Surprised? Have you ever heard that?

RB: Well, not the whole story, no sir, I don't know that I...

ED: I could sit here and tell you stories.

RB: Now, the members of your band, there were quite a few of them locals?

ED: Just my brothers.

RB: How many brothers? Run through them again.³

ED: There's four brothers, but only two played in the band -- the rest were younger. Two played in the band, but they all played -- they were musicians, they all played.

RB: Which ones played in the band?

ED: Well, the drummer, "Noonie" -- we called him Noonie -- Jerome Clement was his right name.⁴ And Norbert -- he was next to me in age. He played sax, and he was a good

³ In addition to Elmer "Elmo", the Donze brothers were: Norbert "Boats", Jerome C. "Noonie," Donald M., and William C.

saxophone player. He played with Burt D'Arcy's [phonetic spelling] Canada King of Swing. He was on the road too, a different time [than] I was on the road. And he was a good musician.

RB: But your other members were from out of town?

ED: Yeah. Yeah, they ?lived? here, you know. We had all these different businesses: my brother and I [owned] an appliance store, a jewelry store, drug store, insurance agency.

RB: How did you have time to do all that?!

ED: Well, I'm a workaholic. (laughs) I still never run out of work. Know what I did yesterday? I cleaned the chandeliers on the second floor -- all day. I enjoy working, and always have. If I have nothing to do, it drives me crazy. But I am slowed down, you know, I'm limited [in] what I can do.

RB: Mr. Donze, let me end with one more question to you, concerning this project that we have about newspapers and that: Do you have any suggestions of individuals that you know who would be good to catch, that might be older people who have a lot of experience, but who would talk with us about...?

ED: About newspaper?

RB: Yes sir, about the history of it.

ED: *[pauses to think]* No, not here. (coughs) I've a little flu coming back.

RB: Is there anybody, for instance, at The Herald that you think would be...?

⁴ Mr. Donze actually said "Clement Jerome," but it was rightfully "Jerome Clement."

ED: I'm not familiar with those people at The Herald. (coughing) They come and go. It's owned by a syndicate too. It may not be owned by a syndicate, but owned by a man in Festus, and every time you turn around, they have a new editor.

RB: I see.

ED: *[pause]* I don't talk to them, you know, and my son has very little to do with them. I don't know who to direct you to. You just go over there and make yourself known and you could talk to them and they'd be glad to talk to you, I'm sure.

RB: I'm sure, uh-huh. But that's an interesting story, like when you talk about the change in technology, for instance, when you changed over from...

ED: To offset?

RB: To offset printing. And then the next change, I guess, was big too, the computer. Computerized change, that's an awful big change.

ED: Yeah, everything's computer now.

RB: Were you still involved in the business when they changed and started going to computer?

ED: No, no.

RB: You weren't involved in it at that point. But your son had to go through *that* change.

ED: Yeah! Well, when he went in, he went right to it. Right to it, yeah.

RB: See, that's the kind of things that are sort of interesting. You know, in years to come people won't realize what was involved in this kind of a change.

ED: When I had the cable system, we got a computer in the office for billing. And at the very, very early stage, in '73, you couldn't even find anybody in the business. We had to call a man from Rolla, Missouri, to come down here to sell us a computer. And we'd call back and forth on the phone [to] learn how to operate it. And we finally got it up and working. And then when I sold the cable business, the wife said, "Get that thing out of here!" So I gave it to a guy in St. Louis. I said, "Come down and you can have it." I gave it to him.

RB: It's an antique now.

ED: Yeah, it's an antique! But it did a good job for us, for the billing. You know, that's all there was, just for billing, you know.

RB: Okay, Mr. Donze, I appreciate you taking this time with us today, and showing me also your various things.

ED: I'm kind of sorry I choked up a few times, but those were emotional times.

RB: That's right.

ED: Still strikes me funny. At the time in your life, you go through these emotional things, and they come back.

RB: Right. They have a lot of force when they come back.

ED: Yeah.

RB: Well, I appreciate your sharing those various stories with us.

[Tape Counter 225; End of Tape 2, Side 2. End of interview]